

AN  
EPISTLE  
TO  
FRIENDS.

By Thomas Ellwood.

**D**EAR Friends, unto whom the gathering Arm of the Lord hath reached, and who have known, in your Several measures, a being gathered thereby into the heavenly Life, and are Witnesses of the preserving Power, by which ye have been kept faithful to the Lord; and *regardful of his Honour*; Unto you, in an especial manner, is the Salutation of my true and tender Love in the Lord, and for you, as for my self, are the Breathings and fervent desires of my Soul offered up, in the one Spirit, unto him, who is your God and mine; that both you and I may forever be kept in the fresh sense of his tender mercies, and great loving kindness unto us, that therein our Souls may cleave firmly unto him, and never depart from him. For Friends, it is a trying day, a day of great difficulty and danger, wherein the Enemy is at work, and very busie, setting his *Snares* on every side; and spreading *Temptations* on every hand: And some, alas! have entred there into, and are caught and held therein, for whom my Soul in secret mourns.

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And truly Friends, a great weight hath been upon my Spirit for many days, and my mind hath been deeply exercised, in the sense I have of the Enemy's prevailing, by one bait or other, to *unsettle* the minds of some, whom the Arm of the Lord had reached unto, and in some measure gathered to a resting place: But not abiding in that pure Light, by which they were at first visited, and to which they were at first turned, the *Understanding* hath been *Vailed* again, the *Eye* which was once in some measure Opened, hath the God of the World insensibly *Blinded* again, and Darkness is again come over, to that degree, that they can now contentedly take up again what in the day of their Convincement, and in the time of their true Tenderness, they cast off as a burden too heavy to be born. Oh, my Friends, this hath been the *Enemy's work*; Therefore it greatly behooves all to watch against him: for it hath been for want of *watchfulness*, that he hath got entrance into any. For when the mind hath been from off the true Watch, in a secure and careless State, then hath he secretly wrought, and presented his *fair baits*, his allurements and enticements by pleasure or profit, to catch the *winnowy mind*. And hence it hath come to pass that some, who have come out fairly, and begun well, and have seemed in good earnest to have set their hand's to God's Plow, have looked back, and been weary of the Yoke of Christ, and have either *lusted after the Flesh-pots of Egypt* again, or turned aside into some *By-path* or crooked way in the Wilderness, and thereby have fallen short of the promised good Land.

But you, my dear Friends, in whom the Word of Life abides, and who abide in the virtue and savour thereof, ye know the *Wiles* of the Enemy, and the Power which subdues him, and the *Rock* in which the Preservation and safety is. So that I write not these things unto you, because ye know them not: But the end of my thus writing is, to stir up the pure mind in all, upon whom the Name of the Lord is called, that we all may be provoked to *Watchfulness* against the workings of the wicked one. Therefore dear Friends, bear, I beseech you, the word of Exhortation, though from one that is little and low (and through mercy Sensible of it) and who hath not been accustomed to appear after this manner: For *The Wind*, ye know, *bloweth where it listeth*.

Friends, call to mind the former times, and remember the days that are past and gone, when the day of the Lord first dawned unto you, and his Power seized upon you. Ye know how weighty and retired the Spirits

Spirits of Friends then were, how Grave and Solid their Deportment and Carriage; how few and savoury their words, tending to edify the hearers; how great a fear and backwardness was in them, to enter into familiarity with the World's People. O Friends, That was a good day, and that was a safe state; for fear begets Watchfulness & watchfulness is a means to prevent Danger. Therefore all Friends, keep in the holy fear, & therein watch against the Enemy, that he entangle you not, and hurt your Spirits, by a *too near Familiarity* and intimate Conversing with the People of the World; for therein, I assure you, lies a snare. For though it be both lawful and necessary, and in some cases also useful and serviceable to the Truth to converse with them that are without: Yet if any Friend should adventure in a frank and free mind, *beyond the limits of the pure fear*, to entertain Familiarity with the World's People, the Spirit of the World in them will *seek an Entrance*, and, if not diligently watched against, will also *get an Entrance*; and bring a hurt and a loss upon him or them into whom it so gets. For being once entred, it will insensibly work, and dispose the mind into which it is got, to a *Condescension* to, and *Compliance* with the People of the World it converses with; first in one thing, then in another, in *Words*, in *Behaviour*, &c. (little things in appearance, but great in consequence) till at length an *indifference* gets up in the mind, and the Testimony of Truth by Degrees is let fall. But while the pure fear is kept to, and dwelt in, the *watch* is always set, the Spirit is retired and weighty, and an holy *Ausfulness* rests upon the mind, which renders such converse both safe to the Friends, and more serviceable to them they converse withal.

And Friends, not only in your conversing with the World's People, but in all your Conversation and Course of life, Watch against the Spirit of the World, for it lies near to tempt, and to draw out the mind, and to lead back into the World again. You know, Friends, that at the first, when the visiting arm of the Love reached to us, he led us out of the World's *Ways, Manners, Customs and Fashions*, and a close Testimony, both in word and practice, was born against them. But how hath this Testimony been kept up, and kept to by all, that have since made profession of the Truth. Ah, how hath the Enemy, for want of *Watchfulness*, stole in upon too too many, and led out their minds, from that which did at first convince them, into a *Liberty beyond the Cross* of Christ Jesus; And in that liberty they have run into the *Worlds Fashions*, which the Worldly Spirit continually invents to feed the

the vain and airy minds withal, that they may not come to Gravity and Solidity.

Thence it hath come to pass, that there is scarce a *New Fashion* comes up, or a *Fantastick Cut* invented, but some or other, that professes Truth, is ready, with the foremost, to run into it. Ah Friends, the World sees this and smiles, and *points the Finger* at it. And this is both a hurt to the particular, and a Reproach to the general. Therefore, O let the Lot be cast, let search be made by every one, and let every one examine himself, that this *Achan*, with his *Babylonish Garment*, may be found out and cast out: for indeed he is a *Troubler of Israel*. And all Friends, who upon true search shall find your selves concerned in this particular, I warn and exhort you all, Return to that which at first convinced you; to that keep close, in that abide, that therein ye may know, as at the first (not only a *Bridle* to the *Tongue*, but) a *Curb* to the *roving mind*, a *Restraint* to the *wandering desire*. For assuredly, Friends, if Truth be kept to, none will need to learn of the World what to wear, what to put on, or how to shape and Fashion their Garments: but Truth will teach all how best to answer the end of *Clothing*, both for *useful service* and *modest decency*. And the Cross of Christ will be a *Yoke* to the *unruly will*, and a *Restraint* upon the *wanton mind*; and will crucifie that nature that delights in *Finery* and in *Bravery* of Apparel, in which the true adorning doth not stand, but in the *hidden man of the heart*, in that which is not corruptible, even a *meek and quiet Spirit*, 1. Pet. 3. 4. And the Grace of God, which hath appeared to all, and which hath brought Salvation to many, will not only teach to deny ungodliness and worldly Lusts, and to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present World, Titus 2. 11, 12. but will also lead them that obey it out of all Excess, and out of all Superfluities and worldly vanities, and will teach them to order their Conversation aright. Therefore to this heavenly Grace be every mind turned, and therein staid, that thereby all who profess the Truth may be kept within the holy *Limits* of it; that in the whole Conversation and Course of life, in Eating, in Drinking, in putting on Apparel, and in whatsoever else we do, or take in hand, all may be done to the glory of God, 1 Cor. 10. 31. that our Moderation in all things may appear unto all men.

And let not any deceive and hurt themselves with a false Plea, saying, *I will be left to my liberty; I have Freedom to do, go, or wear so and so; And Religion stands not in Clothes, &c.* For that liberty which the worldly

worldly Spirit leads into, is not indeed true liberty, but is a *false and feigned liberty*, which leads into *true and real Bondage*. And though Religion stands not simply in Clothes; yet true Religion stands in that which *sets a bound and limit to the mind* with respect to Clothes, as well as to other things. So that where there is a running out into *Excess* and *vanity* in Apparel, that is a certain indication and token that *the mind is got loose*, and hath *cast off the Yoke*, and is broke away from its due *Subjection* to that divine Power, in which the true Religion stands.

Great hath been the hurt which the Enemy hath done in this day, by leading into a *false Freedom*, and crying up a *wrong Liberty*: for under this Pretence have crept in *great Disorders*, some running out one way, and some another; some mixing in Marriages with the World's People, and some going to the Priest to be married. And many *loose and unclean* Spirits have shrowded themselves under this plausible Pretence of *being left to their liberty*, unto whom Trnth's Order is irksom and uneasie; and they kick against it, and call it *Imposition* because it *checks their licentious Liberty*. Therefore all, who joyn with their Plea, examine and try what Liberty it is ye claim and stand for: for the true Liberty is not inconsistent with the Cross of Christ, nor repugnant to his Yoke; but agrees with it, and is obtained through it, and maintained by it. And none whom the Son hath made free indeed, will, or can plead, or make use of that Liberty in *Opposition* to any Means, which the God of Order hath appointed, or set up in his Church for the keeping out Confusion, disorder and Loosness. And hereby all may take a right Measure, and may certainly know *what kind of Liberty* that is, which some have so hotly contended for in Opposition to that necessary and commendable Order, which God hath led his People into, and which the Enemy, in his Agents, labours so hard to lead, or drivethem out of. For the Enemy well knows, that the tendency and service thereof is to detect and discover his secret workings, and to *bring his Deeds to Light* and Judgment; and therefore he strives with might and main to overturn it, crying out through his Instruments, *Away with your Order, Let every one be left to his Liberty*. By which seemingly fair and specious Plea, not only the loose, disorderly, factious Spirits have been let up, and encouraged to greater boldness and *licentiousness*: but some simple and well meaning Friends also, not seeing the *design of Satan* herein, have been misled thereby, and made use of by the Enemy, and the more subtle of his Instruments, to oppose the good Order of Truth.

Thus hath the Enemy wrought, and sought to lay waste the work of the Lord. But the Lord (magnified be his holy Name) hath not been wanting to his People, that in sincerity of Heart have diligently waited on him, and trusted in him; for he hath all along raised up some, whose Eye he hath opened to see the Design and working of the Evil One; and whose Spirits he hath engaged to stand up in a faithful Testimony against him, *contending for the way of Truth*. Which when they in whom the Enemy wrought, perceived, and found they could not run over the heads of Friends, and carry things on as themselves pleased, they set themselves, *in a heady willful Spirit*, to raise Disturbances in Meetings for business, by encouraging and abetting such *heady, loose, contentions and disorderly* persons as would joyn with them; thus hardning themselves, and provoking the Lord to give them up to *blindness and hardness of Heart*, till at length the Enemy prevailed so far upon them, as to work them, by degrees, from *Disconsent to Prejudice*, then to *Enmity*, and so at length, in divers places, to an open defection, Apostacy and Separation.

Now although I know, my dear Friends, that ye who have kept *your Habitation* in the Light of the Lord, and whose Eye is single therein, have a clear sight and understanding that the Spirit, which hath thus wrought and sought against the Truth, is not, nor can be, of God, but is of the Wicked One; And although the Fruits it hath brought forth, through the Agents and Instruments in and by which it hath wrought, viz. making *Disturbances* in Meetings, to the *Breaking* the Churches Peace, Causing *Divisions* amongst Friends, *Publishing* to the World most wicked, *Malicious, railing and scandalous* Books, against Friends (an effect of the greatest Enmity) *shutting* and keeping Friends out of their common *Meeting-houses*, in which they have a just *Right and Property*, and not suffering them to meet therein (which is a part of the Persecution inflicted on Friends by the World) and at length, also setting up *separate* Meetings, in *Opposition* to the Meetings of God's People; Although, I say, these Fruits are sufficient of themselves to discover and manifest, to an *Unclouded* mind, what Spirit that is, and must needs be, that hath brought them forth: Yet inasmuch as some, partly through *weakness of Judgement*, and partly through *personal Affection* to some of those leading Separatists, are yet in danger to be betrayed by their *fair words and fained speeches*, wherewith they ly in wait to deceive, I feel a concern remain upon my Spirit, in the love of God, to warn all such, that they joyn not with, nor give Countenance unto that Spirit, that hath thus wrought against the Lord, and  
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against his People. For Friends, In the holy *fear* of the living God, and in the *Openings* of the *Spring*, of his pure *life* in my Soul, at this time, and from the *certain* knowledge and *clear* demonstration which I have received from him therein. I testify and declare unto you, that this Spirit, which in this day hath *run out*, and hath drawn out some, into *Opposition* against the way and work of the Lord, into *Division* and *Separation* from the People of the Lord, and from the holy Assemblies which the Lord hath gathered, and by his powerful presence hath owned, and daily *doth own*; this Spirit, I say, is the same with that which hath formerly wrought, in *other appearances*, against the Truth in our time, and is the same with that Spirit, that wrought against the work of the Lord in the dayes of the holy Apostles. This *Mystery of Iniquity* then wrought, and caused many to *turn aside*; and to leave the right way of the Lord, and to *forsake the Assemblies of Gods People*, Heb. 10. 25. yea, and to *run into Separation* too, Jude 19. Upon whom the Holy Ghost hath set this *Brand*, That they were *Sensual, having not the Spirit*. And many *close* and *sharp* Testimonies did the Lord give forth through his Servants in that day against this Spirit, and against those that were joyned to it and acted by it, as may be seen in the holy Scriptures.

Yea, Friends, this Spirit that hath led some now to set up their *Separate Meetings*, is the same that led Jeroboam the Son of Nebat to set up his *Separate Altar at Be-hel*, of which you may read, 1 Kings 12, & 13, Chapters. He was afraid, that if the people should continue to *go up to the House of the Lord, to do Sacrifice there*, as they had been accustomed to do, and as the Lord had required, they would then forsake him, and return to the Lord again. And this Spirit now is afraid, that if they whom he hath *seduced*, and drawn aside, should still frequent the *Assemblies of God's People*, and continue to meet with Friends as before, that heavenly Power which is *eminently manifest* in the Meetings of God's People, might at one time or other reach unto them, *touch their Hearts, open the right Eye* in them, and give them to see the *Mischief* and *Misery* he is leading them into. And therefore to prevent this, and to keep his Captives close unto him, he hath contrived to set up *separate Meetings*, in *Opposition* to the Meetings of God's appointment, as Jeroboam set up his *separate Altar*, in *Opposition* to the Altar which God had commanded to be set up, and to keep the People from going thereto. And so subtilly did this Spirit work then, as well as now, that Jeroboam contrived to have his false Worship bear some resemblance to the true, that he might

he more easily beguile the people : For he ordained a Feast, like unto the Feast that was in Judah, 1 Kings 12. 32. but it was in the Month which he had devised of his own heart, ver. 33. Mark that ; there is a Blot upon it : how fair or specious soever the Worship he set up appeared or seemed to be, yet it was but the device of his own heart ; it was neither appointed by God, nor accepted of God. For you may read in the 13th Chapter, that the Lord sent a Prophet, a Man of God, out of Judah to Bethel ; And he cried against the Altar in the Word of the Lord, and prophesied the Destruction thereof by Jofiah, which was afterwards outwardly fulfilled, as you may read, 2 Kings 23 15, &c. Now Jofiah signifies, The fire, or burning of the Lord. And in the holy dread of the living eternal God I declare, The fire of the Lord is kindled, and kindling against this accursed separating Spirit, and against its work, and against all that joyn with it therein. Therefore all fear before the mighty God, and stand still and consider your wayes : and let none resist or reject the warning of the Lord, lest such be hardened to destruction. For Jeroboam, you may read, stood by his separate Altar, ver. 1. And when he heard the saying of the man of God, which he cryed against the Altar in Bethel, he put forth his hand, saying, Lay hold on him. But his hand which he put forth against him, dried up, so that he could not pull it in again to him, ver. 4. O Friends consider, How hath drinss and withering come upon many a great and stout One in this day, who have lifted up themselves against the Lord, and have sought, by the devices of their own Hearts, to establish themselves in their own way, against the way of the Lord ; so that the hand they have put forth in that work, they could not pull in again. Now mind I pray you Friends, and observe the way of the working of this Spirit in that day. Here was the Enmity, the rough nature of Cain and Esau, the Spirit of Persecution, got up first in Jeroboam, to dismay the man of God : Lay hold of him, says he. But when he saw that would not do ; then the Subtle Serpent, the Crafty Fox, the Fair Speeches, the Smooth Words, the Seeming Friendship and Shew of kindness to Betray him. Come home with me, says he to the man of God, and refresh thyself, and I will give thee a Reward, ver. 7. O Friends, stand in the Fear and Counsel of the Lord, and in the Dominion of his Power, over this wicked Spirit in all its Twistings and Twinings. Let neither the Frowns nor the Fawnings, the Threats nor the Flatteries, the hard Speeches nor the Oily Words, the Pharisaical Friendship, the dissembling Love, the seeming Kindness, the familiar Carriage, the free Entertainment, the fine Bit, the Offer of Advantages, &c. have any Influence upon you, to draw you, in the least measure,



to joyn or touch with God's Enemy, with him that sets up a separate Altar, a *Separate Meeting*, in *Opposition* to, and to draw or keep from the right way of the Lord; mind well the Answer, which the man of God gave to *Jerobam's* tempting invitation. *If (said he) thou wilt give me half thine house, I will not go in with thee, neither will I eat Bread nor drink Water in this place,* ver. 8. (This was where the *Separate Altar* was set up) And he gives a forcible Reason for it; *For so was it charged me by the Word of the Lord,* ver. 9. Here now you see both the *Charge* of the Lord, and the *good Resolution* of the Man of God: I will not go in with thee who hast revolted from God; neither will I, eat or drink in this place, where an *Ensign of Separation* and *Opposition* to the way of God is set up. Consider this well I warn you All, in whom there is yet any *true Breathings* after the living God, who retain any *Tenderness*, and in whom there is any *Simplicity* left; Consider this well, I say, when thy *pretended Friend* or *Friends*, in a great deal of *Seeming* love and kindness, shall invite thee to partake with them at their *Separate Altar*, to sit down with them in their *Separate Meeting*. *Thou canst not be a Man of God, and go in with them, or Eat or Drink in that place:* Thou canst not sit down there, to wait for the *Bread of Life*, or the *Water of Life*, to be given thee there: No, *The Word of the Lord*, if thou give heed unto it, will *Charge thee otherwise*: Therefore to that pure living *Word* let every mind be turned, and thereto kept, in a diligent waiting to receive *Wisdom*, *Strength* and *Power* from the Lord therein, that none may be betrayed by the *Subtily* of the Enemy, with whatsoever *fair pretence* He may come. For remember how the *Man of God*, that was enticed by another to eat and drink outwardly at *Bethel*, the place where the *Separate Altar* was set up, *lost his outward life* therefore, ver. 18. and 24. And if thou shalt presume to go in, to *Eat* or to *Drink* Spiritually, that is, to joyn in *Worship* with the Sons of *Nebat* at this day, in the *separate Meetings*, that any of them have set up, in *Opposition* to the *Assemblies* of God's People, and to the *Blessed Way* and *Work* of the Lord, how know'st thou but thou mayst for ever lose thy *Spiritual life*, and never know a day of *Quickening* more?

Therefore all Friends, watch against every Temptation thereunto, as you love your lives, as you regard the good and eternal welfare of your Souls; and let not the *Name*, nor *person* of any Man have Power over you, to draw you aside, neither let *Numbers* sway with you, in which, I know, these *Adversaries* of Truth do not a little boast (though, blessed be God, with little reason) but remember that *Jerobam* of old had *Ten Tribes* out of *Twelve* to cry up his *separate Altar*; Not-  
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withstanding which, he is *branded* to Posterity in the holy Record, with this *Brand*; Jeroboam the Son of Nebat, WHO MADE ISRAEL TO SIN, 2 Kin. 14. 24. Therefore let not any follow a *Multitude to do Evil*, Exod. 23. 2. but all *follow that which is good*, both among your selves, and to all Men, 1 Thes. 5. 15. For Friends, you know whither the *broad* way leads, and what it is the *wide* Gate opens into, which the MANY, go in at: But keep ye to the *strait* Gate, and walk ye on in the NARROW way; for in it is *safety*, and at the end of it everlasting *happiness*.

But Friends, because of the *straitness* of this Gate, and the *Narrowness* of this way, some that have attempted to walk in it, are grown *weary* of it, and have sought out *another way*, a way which (*Jeroboam* like) they have *devised of their own Heart*; wherein they may have more room, more scope, more Company, *Ease* in the Flesh, *Liberty* to the Flesh, and all *without controul*. And this I am satisfied, hath not been the *least* motive to the Separation in this day (as it was the *greatest* in days past) though some that have been drawn into it, may not perhaps, see the Ground upon which it was undertaken. But the Lord hath *opened an Eye* in many, which sees the *Rise and Ground, Entrance and End* of this *Libertine Spirit* and its work. And this *Eye* will the Lord daily open more and more in all, that diligently and in sincerity wait upon him. Therefore All Friends every where, who have not yet a clear sight, and a thorow Understanding of the *Nature and Work, Design and Drift* of this *Dividing Spirit*, Wait, I beseech you, in *Simplicity* of Heart and *Lowliness* of mind, upon the Lord, and keep to the measure of the *Grace* you have received, from him, and suffer not your minds to be *swayed*, or *byassed* by any *personal Kindness, natural Affection, Relation, Kindred, or Acquaintance*; but stand *Single* and open to the Lord, not joyning to or any way *countenancing* that which the Testimony of Truth, in the arisings of the Heavenly Life, and breakings forth of the divine Power through any, goes forth against. So will your present standing be *safe*, and you be preserved out of the *snarcs* of this *insinuating and treacherous Spirit*; And the Lord, in his appointed time, as ye abide with him, will *open your understandings* further, and give you a *clearer Sight* of that, which at present you do not fully see, and thereby bring you to that *Certainty and assurance*, which (blessed be his Name) he hath brought many unto

And you, my dear Friends, whose *Spirits* the Lord hath *stirred up*, and whose *Hearts* he hath *engaged*, in an holy Zeal, to *stand up* for his Blessed Name and Truth, and to bear a faithful Testimony against this wicked  
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rending Spirit; Go on in the strength and power of the Lord, in the might of the God of *Jacob*: for you are assuredly on the Lord's side; and the Lord *Jehovah*, the strength of *Israel*, is on your side. Therefore Friends, be encouraged in the Lord to stand *steadfast in your Testimony*, not giving way to the Enemy, no not for a moment. And take heed, I beseech you in the Love of God, how ye enter into any *Treaty of Peace*, or *Terms of Agreement* with this *ungodly treacherous Spirit*, which is out of the Truth, and draws out of the Truth, and fights against the Truth, For there is no Peace unto it, saith my God. And they who have joyned themselves unto it, and have *Wickedly given themselves up* to be acted by it, and to act for it, must pass through the *River of Judgment*, if ever they be *Redeemed* from under its power. Friends, *Condemnation must first be felt and owned, before Reconciliation can be known*; and the fire of the Lord must pass upon the Transgressor, to consume the works of darkness, the *Ungodly Deeds*, the *Envious Reviling Speeches*, the wicked malicious *Slunderous Books and Pamphlets*, &c. and to burn up the Ground from whence they Sprang. For a *Flaming Sword* hath the Lord God set in his *Eden*, which turneth every way, and none that are gone out can ever come in again, but they must pass under the *flaming Edg* thereof. Therefore my dear Friends, stand your ground in the authority of the heavenly life, and tamper not with God's Enemies: Remember the word of the Lord to the Prophet, *Let them return unto thee, but return not thou unto them*, Jer. 15. 19. And then what follows? *I will make thee unto this People a fenced Brasen Wall; and they shall fight against thee, but they shall not prevail against thee: for I am with thee to save thee, and to deliver thee*, saith the Lord, ver. 20. So the God of Life fill your Hearts daily more and more with a *Phineas Zeal* for the honour of his Name, and furnish you abundantly with *Wisdom and Counsel*, with *Boldness and Courage*, with *Strength and Power*, to encounter and overcome the Enemy; And make every one more watchful against the Spirit of the World, to withstand it in all its *allurements to vanity*, of whatsoever kind, that whatsoever would defile the Camp of the Lord, may be purged out, and kept out, that the Lord may more and more delight in his People, and shower down his Blessings upon them; which is the fervent desire of,

Your Faithful Friend, in the Love and Service of the  
Unchangeable Truth,

The 24th. of the 2d. }  
Month. 1686.

Thomas Ellwood.